Mr. P. V. Raphael *(Joint Secretary to Government):* It is a matter purely for the companies.

മിസ്റ്റർ വി. കെ. കട്ടി: ഇൻഡ്യാ ഗവണ്മെണ്ട് ചെയ്യുവാനാലോചിക്കുന്ന പദ്ധതിയ്ക്ക് ഇവിടെയും അംഗീകരണം നല്കുമോ?

Mr. P. V. Raphael *(Joint Secretary to Government):* The Government of India is considering the question and they have not come to any final decision.

PRICES OF COMMODITIES—CONTROL OF

222. Mr. K. R. Viswambharan *(Ezhuvas-Talappalli):* Will the Government be pleased to state what all steps have they taken in recent months to control the prices of commodities that are essential for day to day use to the people; who were entrusted with the task of carrying out the orders of the Government in this matter?

Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan Peishkar):* A Price Control Committee with Diwan Peishkar as the President and 9 non-official members who are all members of the Legislative Council was appointed early in August 1941 to advise the Government on questions relating to price control and supply of essential commodities at reasonable prices. The Diwan Peishkar was authorised to fix prices in consultation with this Committee and after taking the approval of the Government. The Diwan Peishkar has been doing so from time to time in respect of rice, kerosene oil and matches. Soon after Japan entered War, the then Inspector of Police, Mattancheri Town Station, was appointed to be on special duty in Mattancheri and Ernakulam to see if the prices fixed by the Diwan Peishkar were adhered to by the merchants and also to see if the consumers were getting the essential commodities when needed. A Price Control Officer was subsequently appointed for the whole State to enforce price control throughout the State.

The Government have also ordered by a Notification the submission of periodical returns of stock of rice, paddy and kerosene by merchants holding stocks over quantities specified in the Notification. The Diwan Peishkar, Commissioner of Police, Tahsildars, Inspector of Police, Chairmen and Commissioners of Municipalities and the Price Control Officer have been authorised to inspect godowns and accounts to check these returns.

Mr. K. R. Viswambharan *(Ezhuvas-Talappalli):* May I know whether the Government issued orders changing the rates of prices of commodities from time to time?

Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan Peishkar):* Yes, they have.

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Mr. K. R. Viswambharan *(Ezhuvas-Talappalli):* May I know whether there is any instance where any increase in the price of commodities has been effected by such orders ?

Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan Peishkar):* In a few cases there was an increase in the prices because the original prices were not correct.

Mr. A. B. Salem *(Mattancheri):* Are these prices arranged in consultation with the committee or by the Diwan Peishkar ?

Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan Peishkar):* Every change has been effected only in consultation with the committee.

Mr. C. R. Iyyunni *(Trichur-South):* May I know, Sir, whether the representatives of the merchants or the merchants themselves were consulted before the prices of articles were fixed ?

Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan Peishkar):* In cases in which they made representations, those representations were considered. I myself go to Mattancheri and Ernakulam bazaars to find out the prices from time to time and on my information which I place before the committee they fix the prices. If the merchants are dissatisfied, they come and make representations to the committee. The committee consider and make the change if they think it necessary.

Mr. C. R. Iyyunni *(Trichur-South):* May I know whether there have been complaints from the merchant class with regard to the prices fixed ?

Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan Peishkar):* There were. When the price was fixed for the first time after Japan entered into the war, there were complaints from Trichur merchants.

Mr. K. R. Viswambharan *(Ezhuvas-Talappalli):* May I know whether there were complaints from consumers ?

Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan Peishkar):* Except with regard to kerosene oil there was no complaint from consumers.

Mr. M. L. Joseph *(Latin Christians-Cranganur):* May I know whether the Price Control Officer has been given power to direct the merchants with regard to the places of storing rice bags ?

Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan Peishkar):* Not to my recollection.

Mr. M. L. Joseph *(Latin Christians-Cranganur):* May I know whether the committee is contemplating about directing the merchants about the place of storing the rice ? In view of the impending danger of an easy attack do not the committee think that if rice is stored in Mattancheri alone there is the possibility of the rice being destroyed ? So do not the committee think that there is the

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necessity of seeing that at least a major portion of the stock is removed from Mattancheri to some other safe place within this State?

Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan Peishkar):* This matter has not been placed before the committee.

Mr. A. B. Salem *(Mattancheri):* What are the steps taken with regard to the kerosene oil?

Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan Peishkar):* The merchants have been asked to evenly distribute stock. If any complaints are received we ourselves go, the Price Control Officer goes, the Police Inspectors go and make the necessary enquiries. I call the merchants and ask them to do things in a particular way. This has been going on for several weeks. Till the end of January I have been getting complaints of all sorts and everyone of these things were enquired into so far as can be.

Mr. A. B. Salem *(Mattancheri):* Even merchants with big stock are unwilling to supply so that there is great difficulty felt by the public.

Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan Peishkar):* In some cases the complaints have been rather exaggerated and unfounded. Persons who have not been purchasing even one tin of kerosene suddenly come and ask for two or three tins. They are not merchants. Some of the vakils in Ernakulam who have been having electric connections and who did not want kerosene oil except 2 or 3 bottles for their small lanterns came for tins of kerosene oil as soon as they heard the declaration of war by Japan. There were very many instances. Even small merchants began to stock. One merchant in Trippunittura stocked something on the second floor. He said he had no kerosene at all. We had to run about to get kerosene oil. Finally somebody reported that he has got stores upstairs. We went and found it out. One instance of this type came to the knowledge of the Government from Irinjalakkuda. The Magistrate himself went and did the needful.

Mr. T. P. Poulose *(Kanayannur):* There may have been such difficulties in the first month of war. Subsequently there cannot be any such difficulty.

Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan-Peishkar):* After January I have not received any complaint. I have gone and asked wholesale merchants to distribute their stock evenly.

Mr. E. Ikkanda Warrier *(Cheruthuruthi):* Did not the committee consider the question of Government stocking the necessary quantity of rice?

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Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan-Peishkar):* Soon after Japan entered war and in that week itself the committee thought that it was better at that time to commandeer the whole stock and store it. But it was thought by the Government that that was not necessary. Now we find from experience that the decision of the Government is correct.

Mr. E. Ikkanda Warrier *(Cheruthuruthi):* Did the committee consider this question after the fall of Singapore?

Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan-Peishkar):* We have not met after that.

Mr. E. Ikkanda Warrier *(Cheruthuruthi):* Is the Government taking steps to see that correct weights and measures are used by the merchants?

Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan-Peishkar):* Oh, yes. In all taluks.

Mr. E. Ikkanda Warrier *(Cheruthuruthi):* Were there such cases?

Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan-Peishkar):* There were cases.

Mr. E. Ikkanda Warrier *(Cheruthuruthi):* Were they dealt with severely?

Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan-Peishkar):* Action was taken. I cannot say severely.

Mr. T. P. Poulose *(Kanayannur):* May I know whether the Government has fixed the price of paper?

Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan-Peishkar):* It is under consideration. The Provincial Governments have not fixed rates. It is an All-India question. The Imperial Government have fixed prices of certain kinds of paper. They have directed Provincial Governments to fix prices. The Bombay Government have fixed prices. I have got those prices. The Madras Government have not done it to my knowledge and until that we do not think it desirable to fix the prices here.

Mr. President: I found yesterday in the *Madras Mail* that the Madras Government has fixed the price of paper and we will also take it up soon.

Mr. Ismail Hajee Essa Sait *(Mattancheri):* Has the Government got any letter from the Indian Chamber of Commerce requesting them to take one member from the rice merchants?

Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan-Peishkar):* We had.

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Mr. Ismail Hajee Essa Sait *(Mattancheri):* Has the Government come to any conclusion?

Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan Peishkar):* According to the opinion of certain persons that is not desirable.

Mr. Ismail Hajee Essa Sait *(Mattancheri):* What is the objection to take one member from the rice merchants?

Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan Peishkar):* Supposing we pass any resolution that the stock should be commandeered which will affect their interests, the moment the resolution is passed we shall find stocks being removed, if any rice merchant is a member.

Mr. E. Ikkanda Warriar *(Cheruthuruthi):* Has the Government taken steps to see that there is adequate supply of crude oil for the Power Houses in Trichur and other places?

Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan-Peishkar):* There is an application pending before me by some boat owners. I have got the report of the Price Control Officer also. I have had no time to go through them this morning. I will be doing it in the course of a few days.

Mr. A. B. Salem *(Mattancheri):* May I know, Sir, why the paper manufactured in India should rise in price?

Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan-Peishkar):* It is all due to the merchants' desire to make as much money as possible when an occasion arises. It is exploitation.

Mr. E. Ikkanda Warriar *(Cheruthuruthi):* Does the Government know the quantity of crude oil that is available in Cochin State? Do they exercise any control?

Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan-Peishkar):* We have not been getting any return of stocks from those persons. But I can say, if my information is correct that the last steamer brought in crude oil sufficient for nearly 4 months for normal requirement. If any abnormal requirement comes the question is entirely different.

Mr. E. Ikkanda Warriar *(Cheruthuruthi):* Will the Government be pleased to take steps to see that that oil at least is not exported from the State?

Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan-Peishkar):* The matter will be considered.

Mr. A. B. Salem *(Mattancheri):* Do the Government realise that if they interfere no oil will come here?

Mr. A. Madhava Prabhu *(Diwan-Peishkar):* That point also will be considered.

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